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SENSITIVE  
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STATE FOR NEA/RA, OES, AND AIAG  
STATE PASS TO USAID  
EPA FOR INTERNATIONAL  
USDA FOR FOREST SERVICE/INTERNATIONAL  
INTERIOR FOR INTERNATIONAL/WASHBURNE

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TAGS: [TSPL](#) [SENV](#) [EINV](#) [PGOV](#) [AG](#)  
SUBJECT: EXPANDING ESTH OPPORTUNITIES IN ALGERIA

REF: RABAT 106

11. (U) This is an action request, please see paragraph 11.

12. (SBU) SUMMARY: Algerian government ministries would like to engage in greater cooperation with the USG pursuant to our 2006 Science and Technology (ST) Agreement. During a visit of the ESTH Regional Hub Officer, officials at the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research (the Algerian signatory to the ST Agreement) told us they would be interested in a Joint Commission Meeting (JCM) to develop networks and co-funded collaborations between Algerian and American experts and institutions in priority areas focused on scientific research and research application. The Ministry of Health is likewise interested in expertise exchanges in medical research and application. Government officials and professors told us that Algeria recently enhanced its ST capacity through a newly enacted law and the establishment of an autonomous scientific research administration to align ST spending with national priorities in areas such as water, environment, renewable energy, agriculture, and materials sciences. Health ministry officials claim to be well prepared for a possible pandemic, and believe that while Algeria has never had a reported case of avian flu, the ministry's surveillance and reaction systems are robust. Officials at the Ministry of Environment told us that climate change is a key environmental, economic and political issue for Algeria, because of the physical effects of desertification and the expected challenge the country would face from "environmental migrants" coming from across the African continent and transiting Algeria to reach Europe. END SUMMARY.

ST AGREEMENT: PRESSING FOR NEXT STEP  
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13. (U) We continue to engage the Algerians in cooperative activities related to our 2006 Science and Technology (ST) Agreement, including an ongoing relationship with Algeria's Atomic Regulatory Agency (COMENA) and the Ministry of Energy and Mines regarding nuclear technology and materials handling, as well as a Sister Labs Agreement with the U.S. Department of Energy resulting in several related exchanges.

Dozens of Algerians have also benefited from USG training in IPR, telecommunications broadband and spectrum management, environmental stewardship, breast cancer awareness, wooden sea-vessel construction, and meteorology. A partnership with the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) also supports seismic monitoring in Algeria. We are exploring additional collaborations including a virtual library concept, expertise sharing for the construction of a maritime museum in Algiers, and a project with the Woods Hole Oceanographic Institute (WHOI) to map the Bay of Algiers for cultural and seismic research.

14. (SBU) During the recent visit of the ESTH Regional Hub Officer, officials at the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research described Algeria's efforts over the last decade to enhance scientific research and align it with national goals. A 2008 law updated the original 1998 codification of national research priorities and an administration for scientific research was established with its own financing and staffing. According to Arezki Saidani, director of international cooperation at the ministry, there are ten interagency sectoral commissions to coordinate and implement science and technology programs in priority areas such as water, health, bio-technology, renewable energy, and material sciences. The scientific research administration also established an innovation department to create bridges between academic research and industry. Three regional, university-based incubation/tech-transfer centers are planned for Algeria: one that is just coming online in Tlemcen focused on agriculture, one in Setif focused on electronics, and one in Bejaia focused on agro-processing.

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15. (SBU) Professor Hafid Aourag, director general of the scientific research administration, told us that Algeria has 2500 full-time academic researchers at 19 research centers, and 17,000 part-time researchers among Algerian universities.

He estimated that 20 percent of Algerian researchers have studied in the U.S. Aourag said that the government commitment to scientific research has increased from 34 billion dinars in 1998 to 108 billion dinars (USD 1.5 billion) in 2008; equivalent, he said, to approximately 1.7 percent of Algeria's GDP. There are 7.8 million students in the school system, he told us, and 1.2 million public university students, including 34,000 in masters and doctoral programs. Another 600,000 students pursue vocational training programs. Aourag said that approximately 25 percent of the national budget is spent on education for 9.6 million students, which represents almost one-third of the Algerian population. Ten thousand foreign students from 60 countries also attend Algerian universities, he added.

16. (SBU) Both Saidani and Aourag stressed their desire to add a "roadmap" framework to our ST agreement and offered to host an initial meeting of experts in Algeria to develop networks between American and Algerian institutions in priority areas.

They committed to sending us their top priorities with points of contacts for such a meeting, which would likely include the areas of water, health, biotechnology, renewable energy, agro-development and nutrition, and natural sciences.

Algeria's goals from the agreement would include strengthening U.S.-Algeria ST cooperation, increasing Algerian linkages to U.S. research centers and universities, obtaining American expertise in the area of innovation and technology transfer, and partnering with institutions such as the National Science Foundation (NSF) and the National Institutes of Health (NIH) to strengthen Algerian capacity to manage research grants and govern research priorities and institutions. Director General Aourag and Director of Cooperation Saidani were clear that they expected to co-fund any such efforts, and welcomed American experts to Algeria for consultative visits.

ALGERIA CLAIMS PANDEMIC PREPAREDNESS

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¶7. (SBU) In an unusually warm and friendly meeting at the health ministry (MOH), officials in charge of medical research and infectious and chronic diseases outlined their major goals and their preparedness for pandemics. They told us the country's 150,000 public health workers provide health care delivery services throughout Algeria while also managing population planning, research and prevention through hospital reform. They said private clinics in Algeria supplement the public health care system -- essentially free for the entire population -- creating a network of coverage of two to four hospitals per wilaya (province) on average, with more in urban areas. They told us that, like many developing countries, chronic diseases (heart disease, diabetes, cancer, and respiratory diseases) are becoming more prevalent than infectious diseases. Dr. Ghania Merbout, Deputy Director for Infectious Diseases, was very proud of the country's surveillance and detection system, noting that a strong field alert system is in place for detecting any possible outbreaks. An avian influenza (AI) simulation exercise was done in 2006, and a national committee coordinates AI preparedness with regional, provincial and municipal authorities. While Algeria has not detected any cases of animal or human avian influenza, the MOH believes it is well prepared for any possible pandemic. The health officials told us Tamiflu stocks are maintained throughout the hospital system, although they were unwilling to share how many doses were kept or how many people would be covered.

¶8. (SBU) MOH officials, like their Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research colleagues, promised to

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send to us a list of priority areas in which we could enhance cooperation, noting that they are particularly interested in hands-on training for doctors and health workers in Algeria.

#### CLIMATE CHANGE TOPS ENVIRONMENTAL CONCERNS

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¶9. (SBU) In a meeting at the Ministry of Urban Development, Environment and Tourism, Director of International Cooperation Abdelkader Mekideche and climate change consultant Mostefa Kara focused on climate change in Africa and on the expected impact of desertification and migration patterns. They told us the ministry includes 1000 staff across the 48 wilayas responsible for general environmental management. Mekideche said that various Algerian laws govern environmental management, biodiversity, coastal zone management, waste management and protection of endangered species. He also stressed that the ministry supports the government's strategic goals of promoting economic development in the high-plateau regions so that urban pressures on the crowded coastal areas may be reduced.

¶10. (SBU) Perhaps because domestic environmental management is linked closely to President Bouteflika's current development goals, discussion of global climate change dominated our meeting, as Kara described his work at the National Agency for Climate Change. Kara referred to the group statement that emerged from the African ministerial conference on climate change hosted by Algeria in November 2008, and said that Algeria will lead this forum for the next two years. On the Arab front, Kara said Algeria plans to draft a pan-Arab plan of action to be presented at the December 2009 Copenhagen climate change meetings, similar to the pan-African statement that was produced here in November. Kara told us that Algeria will likely suffer in the future from reduced rainfall, increased desertification, reduced food security (as the plateaus receive less rainfall), and an increased spread of diseases, all as a result of climate change on the continent. Both men expressed a deep fear that, due to desertification, throngs of "climatic migrants," mostly from sub-Saharan Africa but from other regions as well, would flood into Algeria with the ultimate goal of reaching Europe. Kara also bemoaned the fact that, because

of the low contribution to greenhouse emissions, Africa is neglected in climate change discussions by the European Union and to a degree by the U.S.

ACTION REQUEST

¶11. (SBU) Embassy requests Department guidance regarding the Algerian offer to host a Joint Commission Meeting (JCM) to provide additional momentum to our ST agreement. Embassy supports the request and suggests that the fall of 2009 would be a suitable timeframe for such a meeting. ESTH Regional Hub Officer notes a Moroccan request for a JCM (reftel), raising the possibility that a USG delegation to the Maghreb might hold sequential JCMs. We will seek additional guidance on any specific requests for training that may arrive from Algerian ministries per above.

¶12. (SBU) In separate meetings, the ESTH Regional Hub Officer briefed us on a proposal to establish an Arab-American Science Partnership (AASP) with the goal of enhancing scientific research and collaborations to strengthen bilateral ties and promote economic development, employment, and innovation in Algeria and the region. We believe such a focused science diplomacy program with societal and economic benefits could promote the U.S. image and USG interests in Algeria, and look forward to reviewing details as the idea develops.

¶13. (U) This cable was coordinated with ESTH Regional Hub Officer Manu Bhalla, Embassy Amman.

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PEARCE